



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

FOUR SENTENCED IN FORCED LABOR SCHEME

Group Forced Illegal Aliens to Work for Little or No Pay

BUFFALO, N.Y.— Peter J. Smith, Special Agent-in-Charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Buffalo, announced today that four individuals have been sentenced for their part in a forced labor ring. A woman and her two sons both received prison sentences and the husband received probation for their parts in the scheme.

The case was investigated by ICE and jointly prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of New York and the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. This case is one of the first uses of 18 USC Section 1589, a law passed in 2000 to prosecute individuals who subject people to forced labor. All four individuals were indicted in June 2002.

ICE agents discovered that ringleader Maria Garcia, a labor contractor from Mission, Texas, was recruiting illegal Mexicans from the southwest border and smuggling them to western New York. The ring would approach aliens who had just been smuggled into Arizona from Mexico. Garcia charged the aliens exorbitant fees for transporting them to farm jobs in western New York. Once the farm workers got paid, Garcia would take their checks, cash them and keep the money. The Garcia family told the men they were not free to leave until all of their debts were paid off. However, two groups of victims were able to escape and seek help.

Garcia, her two sons and her husband were sentenced yesterday by U.S. District Court Judge William M. Skretny. Garcia four pleaded guilty in December 2004 to forced labor. Garcia received 46 months in prison. Her son Elias Botello pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit forced labor and was sentenced to 37 months. Her son Jose J. Garcia received 14 months for harboring illegal aliens. Garcia's husband Jose I. Garcia received a one-year probationary sentence, also for harboring illegal aliens. All were ordered to pay restitution to the victims.

"This case is a sad example of how criminals preyed on illegal aliens, including boys as young as 15, by forcing them to work long hours for little or no wages," said Smith. "For people caught up in this kind of crime, there is often no light at the end of the tunnel and no one to turn to for help."

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.